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# Moroccan king makes good on promised reforms

By Edward M. Gabriel

In a major address to the people of Morocco this past Friday, King Mohammed VI of Morocco again made clear his commitment to the future of his country and his long standing pledge to anchor the nation in democratic values, respect for the rule of law, and social equality. While others in the Middle East and North Africa continue to be mired in either uncertainty or a stubborn and increasingly brutal resistance to change, Morocco continues to demonstrate its dedication to the reformist path it has pursued for the past two decades.

In an historic speech, King Mohammed announced that he welcomed the fundamental reform proposals that were submitted by the Constitutional Reform Commission, including recommendations made by civil society, the political parties, and the public via the [www.reforme.ma](http://www.reforme.ma) website. And as he had promised in his speech on March 9, it will be the people of Morocco who will have the final say on the proposed Constitutional amendments in a national referendum scheduled for July 1.

Highlights of the Constitutional amendments:

- Fully implements a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary system of government with sovereignty vested in the people.
- Provides guidance to government institutions to ensure the freedom of its citizens through good governance, human rights, and other basic inalienable rights of the people.
- Establishes that the head of government will be chosen from the largest party elected to parliament by the people, with the power, in consultation with the Council of Ministers, to appoint senior government officials at all levels.
- Establishes an independent judiciary, and guarantees freedom from illegal searches or detention, privacy for communications, as well as the right to a trial and a lawyer for anyone arrested by the authorities.
- Transfers power from central state authorities to elected local and regional officials directly accountable to citizens.
- Recognizes the equality of all citizens regardless of sex, origin, language, religion, or creed. Women will be treated equally with men in the constitution.

- Ensures that existing and future Moroccan law is in compliance with all international agreements to which Morocco is a signatory.
- Establishes, for the first time, Amazigh (Berber) as an official language of Morocco along with Arabic, the official language.
- Reinforces mechanisms to ensure oversight and accountability in the exercise of power in public office.

I was in Morocco during the speech and spent the next day speaking with Moroccans ranging from government officials, NGO leaders, and politicians, to citizens who shared their impressions with me. Their responses were consistent in the expressed determination of Moroccans to treat this as the most meaningful opportunity in their lifetimes to make their government work for them. Even skeptics said that they were impressed that the King went further than they expected.

Strong endorsement of the proposed changes of the King's speech by the U.S. is not premature and it is time to recognize that, despite its many challenges, Morocco has once again taken an unprecedented step in the Arab world to advance a vision of democratic governance and social equality that others in the region would do well to emulate.

As King Mohammed VI made clear in March, the fate of these amendments is now up to the people of Morocco. But it is also now time for the United States to make clear to our oldest friend and ally that we will stand behind their courageous and unprecedented effort to chart a new path for both themselves and, hopefully, others in the region.

*Edward M. Gabriel is former US Ambassador to Morocco (1997-2001) and currently advises the Government of Morocco.*

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